

Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Grant Overview of Wisconsin 2012 Application

Wisconsin's Race to the Top- Early Learning Challenge (RTTT-ELC) Grant was awarded from the federal Department of Education's in the amount of \$22.7 million in December 2012. The Governor appointed the Department of Children and Families (DCF) as the lead state agency for implementing the grant, in collaboration with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Department of Health Services (DHS). The grant offers an ambitious reform agenda that:

- Builds on the State's historic commitment to high quality early learning and development programs to improve child outcomes and the vision articulated in 2010 by the Wisconsin Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC).
- Advances a vision of a strong early childhood system built on quality program standards embedded in a tiered quality rating and improvement system; comprehensive early learning and development standards; quality family engagement practices and supports; a comprehensive early childhood workforce development framework; and, a strong assessment and accountability system.

The grant targets areas where Wisconsin faces the most challenges in the early childhood system, particularly in providing high quality early learning and development experiences for its youngest and most at-risk citizens. Research shows that children with high needs who participate in high quality early learning and development programs are more likely to achieve developmental milestones and enter school ready to succeed. The grant will build on this research and allow Wisconsin to intensively focus efforts on improving the quality of all programs in YoungStar. Key efforts will include:

Strengthen YoungStar and Improve Child Care Quality

Wisconsin will employ the following strategies to increase the number of high quality early learning and development programs as well as the number of participating children with high needs.

- Strengthen family engagement standards and increase provider access to training on child assessment and development.
 - The state will leverage current resources to expand training and onsite technical assistance opportunities, and build its capacity to assist child care programs to work with parents to support children's early learning and development and to connect families with key community based services and supports.
- Promote enrollment of children with high needs in high quality YoungStar programs.
 - The state will leverage an outreach campaign to enroll high quality programs in YoungStar with a communication campaign aimed at increasing participation by working with service systems that serve these families, such as W-2, child welfare and prevention programs. In addition, the state will work to expand the number of collaborative, community-based 4K programs and Head Start and Early Head Start programs participate in YoungStar.
- Accelerate the pace at which programs advance in YoungStar.

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- The state will increase scholarship funds so that providers can access credit based training, credentials and degrees; expanding training and technical assistance, coaching and mentoring for programs; developing communities of practice to better support providers; and providing quality and retention bonus incentives.

Expand Training and Effective Application of the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards

The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards align with the DPI Common Core State Standards and define what young children should learn and be able to do five developmental domains. To ensure that providers have the skills and abilities to apply these standards in practice, Wisconsin will employ the following strategies.

- Develop and expand training on two key domains: social and emotional development and early literacy to providers in targeted areas of the state.
- Develop additional content training on the WI Early Learning Standards and increase the capacity to serve YoungStar providers and other early learning and development programs.

Strengthening Family Engagement and Support

To ensure that providers and parents work together to support children's early learning and development, Wisconsin will use grant funds to

- Develop YoungStar family engagement program standards and related training curricula, building on and aligning with public 4 year old kindergarten and the recently issued Head Start Family Engagement Framework;
- Provide training and technical assistance to YoungStar providers in support of these standards; and,
- Develop and implement a parent outreach campaign aimed at educating parents of children with high needs about how to support their children's early learning and development.

Improve Wisconsin's Early Care and Family Support Workforce

To ensure the availability and retention of well-trained adults who have the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to effectively support children's development, especially those who are disadvantaged, grant funds will be used to support increased provider access to professional development and educational opportunities needed to improve program quality, targeting providers with 2 Star ratings. Strategies include:

- Employ a cross sector professional development coordinator to lead efforts related to credit alignment, early childhood licensing redesign, and career pathways; and,

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- Strengthen regional training delivery structures that include regional coaches and action teams, to leverage resources across systems.

Implement an Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System

To inform policy and practice in early learning and development, grant funding will be used to build an early childhood longitudinal data system that:

- Strengthens and links related early childhood program data systems within each participating state agency; and,
- Uses this data to improve program policy and practices to ensure access and good outcomes for children.

Tribal Outreach Initiative

The initiative will ensure a coordinated approach among participating state agencies and Wisconsin's tribes to improve quality in tribal early learning and development programs.

Public Private Partnership Initiative

A public-private partnership will be seeded to aid in the sustainability of quality improvement activities at the local and state levels.

Early Childhood System Building and Governance

A full-time grant manager employed by DCF will ensure the successful implementation of this grant, working with key managers across the participating state agencies. Additional recruitments will begin in late January for additional four-year project positions, including: YoungStar professional development coordinator and program analyst; three YoungStar program and planning analysts; and, three research analysts (one at each of the participating state agencies).

